DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 316 364 RC 017 399

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TITLE A Changing Rural America: The Context for School Participation in Community Development.
PUB DATE Sep 89
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Regional Conference on the Role of Education in Rural Community Development (Roanoke, VA, September 23-25, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Action; Community Change; *Community Development; Community Study; Economic Development; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Relevance (Education); Rural Areas; Rural Development; *Rural Economics; *Rural Education; School Community Relationship; Social Responsibility

ABSTRACT

Community development depends on capable, visionary local leaders and on informed and active citizens. Thus, in the long run, education for all citizens may be the most critical ingredient to the success of rural community development programs. Schools can further contribute to the development of rural communities by providing an explicit community focus to educational programs. This paper describes the declining economics of rural America in the 1980s, manifested in lost farms, closed businesses, unemployment and underemployment, eroding tax bases, and the inability of local governments to provide needed services. These changes are not just cyclical, but part of a broader restructuring of the national economy. Community capacity to alter this process can be affected by investment in education, with students benefitting through higher earnings and communities benefitting from improved schools and the increased productivity of better educated individuals. Schools can also make explicit contributions to community development by delivering quality education to all students, expanding their mission to include meeting the community's broader educational needs; teaching about the community and how it works; focussing on modern technology; leadership skills, and entrepreneurial abilities; and increasing public awareness of community educational needs. This paper contains 34 references. (DHP)

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A CHANGING RURAL AMERICA: THE CONTEXT FOR SCHOOL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

by

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Prepared for presentation at A Working Regional Conference: The Role of Education in Rural Community Development, Roanoke, Virginia, September 23 - 25, 1989.

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A CHANGING RURAL AMERICA: THE CONTEXT FOR SCHOOL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

As we begin this conference, The Role of Education in Rural Community Development, it appears that the subject is both timely and appropriate. Rural communities, and the businesses and industries operating within those communities, are undergoing (have undergone) profound social and economic change. Successful communities and businesses/industries of the future will be different from those that currently exist in many rural areas, Different development strategies will be required, and different educational policies and programs will be needed to ensure a cadre of adequately trained community/business leaders and community residents/workers.

Policymakers face the challenge of creating rural communities that are attractive to new technology-based, knowledge oriented industries while educators face the challenge of training individuals to live and work in those communities and industries. Rural America is changing, and both development policy and education policy must be re-examined in light of those changes. This conference is one step in that re-evaluation process. It offers the opportunity to consider the linkages between schools and communities necessary to the design and implementation of successful rural education and rural development programs.

In this presentation I hope to set the stage for the more detailed discussions of education-community linkages which are to follow. To accomplish this task, I will first explore the concepts of community and community/economic development by way of establishing a conceptual point of departure for further

discussion. I will then discuss major changes occurring in rural areas in general and, where appropriate, the rural South in particular, and examine their implications for education and community development programs. Finally, I will end by offering specific suggestions relative to the role of the educational system in rural community development.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is useful to further explore the concept of community and the idea of development within the community context.[1] Unfortunately, the terms involved are somewhat nebulous and are used by different people to mean different things at different times (Wilkinson, 1988; Shaffer, 1989). The terms "community development" and "economic development" are often used interchangeably to refer to community growth as measured in demographic or economic terms. Here, following Wilkinson (1988) and Shaffer (1989), the term "community development" is used to refer to activities which increase a community's capacity to organize, identify common interests, and to take action on behalf of those interests, and "economic development" refers to those structural changes which increase the economic vitality of a community. Community/economic development is a process focused on expanding a community's capacity to deal with common problems and on the capacity to sustain economic activity over time.

The word "community," usually refers to some particular place expressed in geographic terms. However, the concept of place, in and of itself, is inadequate to support a useful definition of community for purposes of this

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[1]This section draws heavily on previous papers by the author (1988; 1989a; 1989b).

discussion. There must be some reference to a set of mutual interactions and some common interests to be served by those interactions (Shaffer, 1989). This is not to imply that education or community development programs can or should be implemented without regard to place. Rather, it is to stress the importance of common interests and the ability to act on those interests to the eventual success of such programs.

Further, thinking of a community as a geopraphic place while keeping place considerations secondary to common interests, allows considerations of the dynamic aspects of the community concept. It allows the geographic boundaries of a community to change with a different set of interests, and it allows for the existence of functional sub-communities within the boundaries of a larger community. Further, this approach to thinking of a community allows for the regionalization of development activities where common interests extend across several geographically defined communities, it allows for consideration of the fact that communities compete with each other in a variety of economic and political arenas, and it stresses the fact that events in any particular community are strongly influenced by ties to the larger community of which it is a part (Shaffer, 1989; Shaffer and Summers, 1988).

Further distinction can now be made between community development and economic development and between the idea of development as opposed to growth in the community. As noted earlier, the term "develop" is often used to refer to community growth as measured in demographic terms or economic terms, and the related term "development" is commonly used to refer to particular happenings in particular communities (ie; a new shopping center, a new/expanded business, an industrial plant, or a new sub-division). Such references often refer only to the quantifiable aspects of growth without reference to structural or

institutional change in the community. In contrast "development" as used here presumes structural and institutional change and requires explicit consideration of equity issues (Wilkinson, 1988; Shaffer, 1989; Shaffer and Summers, 1988; Ryan, 1987; Coffey and Polese, 1984; Flammang, 1979). The concept of development is certainly related to community/econmic growth and is often measured using the same variables, however, development implies considerably more than community growth alone.

Community development refers to those changes which increase the capacity of a group of people to identify and act on common interests. In the words of Wilkinson (1988), community development means, "...building (or at least trying to build) the capacity for self-help and self-direction through community action." Economic development differs from community development only in that it focuses more narrowly on improving community economic vitality, the capacity of the community to sustain economic activity over time.

Community development is related to and can result in economic development, although linkages may be indirect and long run in nature. For example, community development programs to improve education, provide better public services, or improve environmental quality may make significant contributions to economic development. By the same token, a lack of economic development as reflected in high unemployment, inadequate public services, and high levels of inequality can detract from a community's capacity to work together on behalf of common interests. Alternatively, economic improvements which reduce income inequality and improve services may contriute to community development (Ryan, 1987; Wilkinson, 1988).

Either economic development or community development may be accompanied by or result from community growth, or either may take place in the absence of

growth, and in some cases, growth may actually detract from development. For example, success of community development efforts may be measured by changes in political access, the responsiveness of local government, or the satisfaction which residents receive from being able to influence change in their community (Libby,1986). Further, to the extent that such changes make a community a more attractive place to live and work, they may very well contribute to community growth over time.

The community concept and the associated idea of development as community capacity and economic vitality provide a framework for considering changes that have taken place in rural areas and for designing educational and development programs to assist rural communities. Community development is a process consisting of actions to improve commuity welfare. The process includes activities such as needs assessment, community analyses, concensus building, and goal setting as precursors to the design and implementation of action programs to address community needs. The process is dependent on capable, visionary local leaders and on informed and active citizens. Thus, in the long run, education for all citizens may be the most critical ingredient to the success of rural community development programs.

A CHANGING RURAL AMERICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

As a recent writer in The Wall Street Journal observed with reference to rural Kansas, "Small towns on the plains no longer are, if they ever were, the kind of places depicted in Norman Rockwell covers" (Farney, 1989). The same point can be made with reference to most other rural areas in the country. The

much heralded "rural turn-around" of the 1960's and 1970's ended, and the decade of the 1980's brought a dramatic reversal of the fortunes of rural America. Many rural areas were unable to retain jobs in traditional employment sectors and equally unable to attract new jobs in expanding, knowledge based manufacturing and service industries. Resulting declines in income and employment in agriculture, forestry, mining, and manufacturing had serious consequences for most, if not all, rural areas and segments of the rural economy (Drabenstott, et al., 1986; Henry et al., 1986).

The dimensions of change in rural communities across the country are obvious (lost farms, closed businesses, unemployment and underemployment, eroding tax bases, and the inability of local governments to provide needed services). Unfortunately, immediate policy solutions are less obvious. Changes initially viewed as cyclical phenomena with import only for communities dependent on agriculture are now perceived to be more fundamental in nature and part of a broader restructuring of the national economy (Beaulieu, 1988; Henry et al., 1988; Dillman, 1988; Dillman, et al., 1989). The increasing "internationalization" of economic activity has seriously eroded the competitive position of traditional rural industries (agriculture, manufacturing, and other natural resource based industries). Resulting employment declines are then further reinforced by shifts within the nation towards a technology-oriented, service-based economy and by continuing structural change within traditional agriculture. Further, the ability of rural areas to attract business and industry has been impacted by the deregulation of financial, transportation, and communications industries (Henry, et al., 1988).

Changes in the rural South differ from those in the nation only by a matter of degree with the differences growing primarily out of differences between the

South and the rest of the nation. These differences are detailed in a recent study by the U. S. Department of Agriculture which classified all nonmetropolitan counties according to the primary source of income (Bender, et al., 1985), in two studies using similar data (Mulkey and Henry, 1988; Henry, 1987), in a series of reports from the Southern Growth Policies Board (Bergman and Johnson, 1986; Commission on the Future of the South, 1986; Rosenfeld, et al., 1986), and in papers by other authors (Billings, 1988; Rosenfeld, 1988; Swanson, 1988).

The South is more rural in character than are other regions, and rural areas in the South are more dependent on manufacturing industry than are rural areas as a whole. The South in general, and the rural South in particular, lags behind the nation in terms of per capita income (Mulkey and Henry, 1988), and levels of educational attainment and work force skills compare unfavorably with those of other areas (Swanson, 1988; Swanson and Butler, 1987; Beaulieu, 1989). As might be expected, poverty rates in the rural South exceed those of other areas, including metropolitan areas in the South and other rural areas in the nation (U. S. Bureau of the Census).

Again, rural America is changing, and those changes threaten the capacticy of many rural communities for collective action and threaten the economic vitality of rural areas in general. Papers cited above and those of other authors (Deaton and McNamara, 1984; Hobbs, 1987; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1987; Rosenfeld, 1987; Hobbs, 1988; Deaton and Deaton, 1988; Nachtigal and Hobbs, 1988) remind us of the extent of rural change and the continuing nature of that change. Further, the studies cited stress the increasing importance of an educated and skilled workforce to the future development of rural areas. Clearly, new development strategies are called for, and improvements in rural education are vital to the success of those strategies.

EDUCATION AND RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Community/economic development is a process which focuses on the capacity of rural communities to engage in collective action and sustain economic activity over time. The community educational system is a vital component of this process since schools both affect and are affected by the community of which they are a part (Mulkey, 1989a). First, an important component of community capacity is individual capacity, and schools are in the process of expanding individual capactiy. Thus, a quality education for all students represents a major contribution to the community development process (Hobbs, 1988; Mulkey, 1989a). Further, learning does not take place in isolation (Mulkey, 1988; Hobbs, 1988; Deaton and Deaton, 1988). Students are a product of their community, and that community influences the educational process in the schools.

Again, schools are a part of the community development process. Thus, for those interested in rural community development, a dimension of rural education improvement of obvious interest relates to the quality of current educational programs. The notion of education as an investment in human capital which yields both private and public (community) returns has been prominent in the economic literature since the publication of the seminal work by Schultz (1961). Community efforts (and dollars) devoted to school improvement represent such an investment. Students benefit directly through higher earnings, communities benefit indirectly to the extent that improved schools make the community a more attractive place to live, and when better educated individuals remain in the community, their increased productivity contributes to the development of the larger community.

Schools can also make explicit contributions to the development of rural communities which extend beyond those arising from improvements in existing educational programs. Fortunately, many of the suggestions for rural school improvement also serve to increase the value of the school system to the community development process. Suggestions offered by Hobbs (1988), Hobbs and Nachtigal (1988), Mulkey (1988; 1989a), and Deaton and Deaton (1988) focus on increasing school/community interactions, interactions which directly contribute to the development of the community. Several of these suggestions are treated in more detail in sections that follow.

1. Schools should strive to deliver a quality education to all students. This point was made earlier and has been made elsewhere (Mulkey, 1989a; Hobbs, 1988), but it deserves repeating because of its overriding importance. From the community standpoint, inequality due either to ethnic background, gender, or socioeconomic status is a major factor which detracts from the creation of community in the sense of collective action (Wilkinson, 1988).

More importantly, inequality influences student performance with potential long run consequences for students and communities. We know that socioeconomic background is an important variable in explaining student performance -- students from wealthier and better educated families perform better in school than those from poorer circumstances (Hanushek, 1989). Evidence also suggests that school performance, especially as reflected in years of schooling completed, is rewarded with higher lifetime earnings (Jorgenson and Fraumeni, 1989). Have we then come full circle? Socioeconomic status influences school achievement which, in turn, is related to socioeconomic status. Questions of inequality in the rural South are further complicated by the fact that socioeconomic status tends to reflect differences among racial groups. More detail will be available

later in this conference, but a quick example is provided by examining poverty rates for the black population in the rural South. The rural South is home to most of the nation's rural (nonmetropolitan) black population, and recent census estimates place poverty rates among blacks in the nonmetropolitan South at over 40 percent. For nonmetropolitan black families with a female household head, the poverty rate is over 65 percent, and for children in those households, the poverty rate is almost 80 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Again, schools simply must come to grips with problems related to inequality. Poor children from poor families represent a significant portion of the human resource potential of the rural South.

2. Rural schools should expand their mission to include the broader educational needs of the community. Again, this suggestion has been offered elsewhere in recognition of the broad range of educational needs which exist in many rural communities. Hobbs (1988) and Nachtigal and Hobbs (1988) stress the need to think of rural schools as learning resource centers while Deaton and Deaton (1988) stress the need to think of education as a lifelong learning process. In short, this suggestion calls for redefining the mission of schools in rural areas, for the development of new programs for new clientele groups. Program examples include literacy training, leadership development, nutrition and health training, child care programs, and a variety of adult education programs. (Mulkey, 1989a).

To be sure, such a mission is much broader than that of the traditional rural school with a concentration primarily on the delivery of formal classroom instruction to school age children.

Further, implementation is complicated by the need to reconsider school financing with respect to levels of funding and source of funds, and by immplications for

staffing requirements of schools. However, with these difficulties considered, the provision of this broader range of educational programs may offer a unique opportunity for rural schools to contribute to the development of rural communities.

3. Rural schools should teach people (students and community residents) about their community and how it works. Basically, effective participation in the community development process requires that people in the community be aware of the social, economic, and political realities facing their community. Hobbs (1987) forcefully reminds us of this point by noting that, "It strains credibility to assume that local development will travel far on ignorance the locality and how it works."

Community groups interested in problems associated with the organization and delivery of public services, for example, must understand the financial structure of local government -- the tax base, tax rates, and the ways in which revenues are raised and spent. Further, community residents who wish to influence taxing and spending decisions must understand how local government functions and have the ability to develop and present alternative proposals.

Groups interested in economic development must understand the local economy, the products produced, inputs required, and the markets served by community businesses/industries. Such information is critical to understanding how the community relates to the economy of the larger state/nation, and it is increasingly important to understand international relationships and how they effect the local area.

The previous paragraphs offer only two examples of useful community knowledge. Other equally important educational needs are likely to exist in any particular community. Such needs offer unique opportunities for rural schools

to provide useful service to rural communities. Further, to the extent that these types of community activities provide opportunities for students to relate academic work to real activities (experiential learning) they can also serve to improve the quality of the educational experience (Hobbs, 1988).

4. Schools should focus on preparing rural residents to accept and use modern technology. We are now witnessing a virtual revolution in the development and application of communications and data processing technology -- a revolution with profound implications for rural communities and rural residents (Dillman, 1988; Dillman, et al., 1989; Hite and Henry, 1988). Dillman (1988) refers to this as the "information age," a period in which the ability to receive, process, and transmit information is as important to the welfare of individuals and communities as were railroads and highways in earlier years.

Dillman, et al. (1989) note the "much heralded promise" of technology to overcome the "tyranny of rural space." In other words, the potential exists for rural areas to move closer to the mainstream of economic activity. However, in the same article Dillman and his co-authors note that the availability of technology provides no guarantee of success for rural communities. With respect to the promise of technology, they note:

> That promise may go unfilled, however. The problem of creating rural jobs in today's information-based service economy is as much social and cultural as it is technological and economic. The physical barriers of distance can perhaps be overcome. But without a modernized telecommications infrastructure, a technologically knowledgeable and sophisticated workforce, and a wider perspective of markets than just nearby communities, rural jobs and businesses will find little relief. Furthermore, the new technologies offer the opportunity to draw rural jobs to urban areas as well as draw urban jobs to rural areas.

Clearly, a large part of the technological challenge facing rural communities is physical in nature. Modern telecommunications systems are necessary for full participation in the information age. However, an equally important part of the technology challenge facing rural communities is building a sufficient human capital base to support applications of modern communications and data processing technology. In short, the capacity of rural people to understand and apply the latest technology in their daily activities will be instrumental in deciding the fate of many rural communities. Note the last sentence of the quote above. Rural communities that lag in human capital skills may find that where modern infrastructure exists, it serves to reduce employment in the community.

As regards the infrastructure side of the technology challenge, rural schools, or more appropriately administrators and teachers in those schools, <u>can</u> play a leadership role in policy debates at the state and federal level. However, rural schools <u>must</u> address the other part of the challenge -- the skills of community residents. If as suggested earlier, rural schools make efforts to become community learning resource centers, it would seem that an important component of that activity should focus on the use of telecommunications and computer technology.

5. <u>Schools should focus on the development of leadership skills and entrepreneurial abilities</u>. A critical component in the community development process outlined earlier is the existence of capable and visionary leaders at the local level with the skills to seek innovative solutions to community problems. Rural areas are not homogenous, and studies of a general nature such as the ones cited here can only serve to delineate the general dimensions of rural problems. Specific communities have specifc problems, each has unique sets

of resources with which to address those problems, and effective solutions are likely to be community specific. Rural schools can play a vital role in training community leaders and providing the information on which those solutions can be based.

Beyond leadership skills, there is increasing evidence of the importance of entrepreneurial abilities at the community level and at the individual/firm level. The idea is much the same as that expressed by Rosenfeld (1987) with respect to vocational education. As opposed to a person trained very well in how to do some particular job, communities and businesses increasingly need individuals who are capable of learning and relearning how to do a variety of things. Group learning activites in the community which focus skill development on the analysis of community problems could well be one step in developing both entrepreneurial and leadership abilities.

6. Schools should provide leadership in programs designed to increase public awareness of community educational needs and the importance of education to individual and community development. It is clear from evidence cited here and elsewhere that quality education is important to communities and critical to the success of individuals. Yet, this evidence is not often translated to community support for educational improvement efforts. Community residents need information on the extent of educational needs/problems, on alternative policies/programs for addressing those problems, and information on the consequences of alternative courses of actions.

Educational improvement programs must go beyond the school and rely on family and community involvement (Mulkey, 1988; Beaulieu, 1989), and this support is to important to be left to chance. Schools must play an active role in providing a forum for discussion of school/community issues, and they must play a role in ensuring that policy debates are based on accurate and complete information.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In summary, rural community development is a process of developing the capacity of rural residents to identify common interests and to act on behalf of those interests, and rural schools are a vital part of that process. Improving the quality of existing educational programs can contribute directly and indirectly to the community development process. However, by expanding the rural school mission to encompass the broader educational needs of the community and by providing an explicit community focus to educational programs, schools can further contribute to the development of rural communities. The result could well be both better schools and better communities.

Suggestions offered here, however, will not always be easy to accomplish. An expanded mission for schools has policy implications at the district, state, and federal level -- implications for the way in which schools are funded, for the types of educational programs offered, for the audience for those programs, and in general, and for the relationships between schools and communities. However, policymakers must not allow these difficulties to detract from the vital role that schools must play in contributing to the success of community development programs.

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